

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 12 December 2001

PRESENT:

Councillor LEGGETT (Chairman); Councillor PARSONS (Deputy Chairman); and Councillors BELSEY, CHARLTON (as substitute for Roberts), MARSH, STANBURY, Mrs SMITH and WILLIAMS (as substitute for Neeham).

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neeham and Roberts).

23. **MINUTES.** The minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2001 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record. The Chairman made reference to the changes in procedures for performance monitoring and the circulation of Performance Indicators to all Members of the Council prior to the meeting to enable any questions to be raised.

24. **USE OF BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMMODATION.** The Committee considered the report of the Acting Director of Housing, Health and Community Finance regarding the current use of bed and breakfast accommodation in Eastbourne. Members were advised that the numbers of households presenting as homeless and accepted for housing as homeless remained significantly down on the same period last year. It was noted that the numbers of households needing to be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation were continuing to be contained. Members welcomed the report and requested further information on the causes, policies and procedures in respect of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

RESOLVED: That a further detailed report on the use of bed and breakfast accommodation be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee.

25. **HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION.** The Committee considered the report of the Head of Environmental Health regarding the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) activity statistics for the period 1st April to 31st October 2001. It was noted that the information was monitored on a monthly basis within the Housing Health and Community Finance Department, an extract of which was included in the September edition of the Members' Newsletter.

As at the end of October 2001, 30 HMO's had been brought up to the Council's standards through the intervention of the officers involved and the target was for 38 properties by the end of March 2002. It was noted that the current rate of progress was ahead of target. The Head of Environmental Health reported that of the 1,200 properties in Eastbourne classed as HMO's, there were 100 bedsits which required registering under the scheme.

Councillor Mrs Healy addressed the Committee regarding the steady progress being made to raise the standard of accommodation for tenants of HMO's and emphasised that improvements were sought for those properties with the highest risk rating. She also reported that a Landlords Watch Scheme was in the process of being established with Sussex Police to look at the facilities and standards of properties. The Head of Environmental Health confirmed that a Risk Assessment Scheme identified those properties with the highest risk rating, the top six of which were considered by the HMO Liaison Group.

RESOLVED: That the current rate of progress, ahead of target, for improving houses in multiple occupation be noted.

26. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA. The Committee considered the report of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Best Value Review Team regarding the outcome of the Best Value Review of Cemeteries and Crematoria. Members were informed that the review team had examined the four challenges set by Cabinet. They included:

- The future of burial, locating a new cemetery and future funding mechanisms.
- Funding and maintaining cemeteries that were effectively closed.
- Managing and responding to the environmental issues concerning the Crematorium.
- Consideration of the asset sale of the crematorium and managing the loss of profit generated by the service.

The details of the main recommendations of the review team were set out in the report. Members were also informed that other areas for action included:

- Meeting the needs of Muslim community.
- Efficient and effective maintenance of cemeteries and crematorium grounds.
- Identifying uses for Ocklynge Cemetery Lodge/Office.
- Improved parking facilities at the Crematorium.
- Improved road and grounds signage.
- Completion of a Memorial Risk Assessment Programme.
- Identifying and establishment of wildlife areas on all sites.
- Improvement of the overall service to meet the needs of the bereaved.
- Reduction of vandalism at Ocklynge Cemetery.

The review team concluded that the most appropriate recommendation would be the retention and improvement of the in-house service for the following reasons:

- The service met national industry set standards on services and also met current Environmental Protection Act emissions legislation.
- Although no national Performance Indicators had been identified by Central Government, the profession itself (The Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration) had developed benchmarking standards through its introduction of the Charter for the Bereaved, of which the service was a signatory.
- The Cremation service had no direct competition from this type of service/product provision for a fifteen to twenty mile radius.

- If the service were ceased without another provider coming forward the impact on this community/area would be significant. Without ring fencing funds for essential maintenance and improvement programmes outlined in the Action Plan, the facilities would become unattractive. The possible provision of a new private facility within that radius may offer an attractive alternative for users on the boundary of Eastbourne.
- The sale of the service would be financially disadvantageous to the Council both in the immediate and long-term.

RESOLVED: (1) That Cabinet be recommended to retain and improve the in-house service for the reasons as set out in paragraph 7.5 of the report.

(2) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the Improvement Plan as set out at 10.0 of the report including:

- Establishment of an Ocklynge Cemetery Friends Group.
- Seeking a partnership to develop a new Cemetery site.
- A Business Plan to providing financial sustainability for the service incorporating the ring fencing of a proportion of income for maintenance and improvements.
- Implementation of a Memorial Safety Programme.

27. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS MANAGEMENT. The Committee considered the report of the Highways Management Best Value Review Team regarding the outcome of the Best Value Review of Highways Management.

Members were informed that the Highways Management Best Value Review had now been completed. Having considered the Highways Management service against the Action Plan and Key Challenges for this review, the review team concluded that the service should be maintained and developed by the Borough Council.

Arising from the review, undertaken over eight months, was a Best Value Improvement Plan, which was detailed at 9.0 in the report. A summary of the Improvement Plan was as follows:

- To further develop and to maintain the Highways pages on the Council's web site and to progress with developments in e-Government.
- To develop improved links with the Community by the setting up of a Highways Forum to which all Community Groups would be invited to attend at which highway and transport issues may be addressed and in which Members would have a key role.
- To consider in the longer term the management of all externalised amenity work contracts within one working group.
- To conduct an Annual Survey of correspondence and to monitor the satisfaction of the users of the Highway Management service.
- To reduce the net budget cost to the Council of providing the Highways Management service in future years by setting more appropriate income targets.

Members were advised that the high number of telephone calls received by the Department would hopefully be addressed by utilising the Council's website and developing further the Highways pages. With regard to the recommendation that consideration be given to bringing the management of all its externalised amenity work contracts into one working group, the Head of Amenities reported that the Group considered that such an

arrangement would provide benefits in procurement and efficiencies in the overall management and monitoring of like contracts. Further work would be necessary on this, however, to fully consider the implications of such a change.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended to approve the Improvement Plan as set at 9.0 of the report.

28. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CLEANSING. The Committee considered the report of the Cleansing Best Value Review Team regarding the outcome of the Best Value Review of Cleansing.

Members were informed that the Cleansing Services Best Value Review including Refuse Collection, Recycling, Abandoned Vehicles, Street Sweeping, Commemorative Seats and Litter Bins was now complete. Arising from the review, undertaken over eight months, was a Best Value Improvement Plan, which was detailed at 10.0 of the report. A summary of the Improvement Plan was as follows:

- To improve communication with the public by developing and maintaining Cleansing Services pages on the Council's web site further to developing e-Government.
- To develop improved links with the Community by setting in place a Cleansing Services Forum to which all Community Groups would be invited to attend at which cleansing service issues may be addressed and in which Members would have a key role.
- To secure a quality based and most cost effective Cleansing Services Contract to be implemented by the Council in April 2003.
- To ensure the proper management of the tendering of the Council's Cleansing Services Contract by setting in place a Project Steering Group that would report to the Best Value Management Committee and subsequently Cabinet on matters determined by the Best Value Review Team in the report and progress with the tender negotiations.
- To seek to improve communication with the Community on waste minimisation and recycling, whilst providing improved security of continued employment for the current temporary post of Recycling Officer.
- To improve joint working with other agencies to ensure the most expeditious processing of abandoned vehicle reports and removal of abandoned vehicles.
- To improve visual amenity and opportunity for the provision of commemorative seats and other commemorative presentations.

Members noted that the review had been complex. It had to take account of a number of factors that had not only influenced the review but also its outcome and Improvement Plan.

The Improvement Plan included matters which would influence, and be influenced by, the outcome of the tender process to commence in January 2002 for the Council's Cleansing Contract, incorporating refuse collection, recycling, street sweeping, public conveniences and attendant services, and dog litter collection. This contract was due to commence in April 2003.

Another major issue, which affected the review, was the need to integrate the Borough's refuse collection and recycling services with an Integrated Waste Management Contract currently being tendered by Brighton and Hove City Council and East Sussex County Council. The Contract for the disposal of the County's waste was due to be awarded in 2002.

Further to these considerations a report was made to the Best Value Management Committee on the 25 September 2001, which sought agreement of the Committee to a revised approach for the review to that which was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2001.

Councillor Parsons outlined his concerns in respect of two of the recommendations of the review team, the details of which were circulated with the agenda. With regard to the inclusion of an option for a six-day working week, he expressed concern that with the requirement to 'catch up' as a result of public holidays, this would inevitably extend to a Sunday, depriving staff of a normal day off in the week. A Sunday collection would not be welcomed or in the best interests of residents.

The Head of Amenities reported that through flexibility in working, potentially over six working days, there could be benefits to any future contractor and to the Council. This would need to be determined however through the tender process for the Cleansing Services Contract that would commence in January 2002. It was confirmed, that other than in exceptional circumstances, it was not envisaged that the collection of household waste would ever take place on a Sunday and that it was likely that this would be expressly excluded in the Cleansing Services Contract.

With reference to the Council's procedures for dealing with abandoned vehicles, Councillor Parsons indicated that this area of service provision should have been included in the Review and the possibility of securing a contractor by tender to provide all of the service requirements should have been investigated and reported on. He referred to a number of other Local Authorities who, as he understood, collected vehicles from the streets in a much shorter period of time than the Council's procedures were likely to achieve.

The Head of Amenities reported that the review team had not considered in detail other opportunities in dealing with the potential removal of abandoned vehicles but had focused on improving the current arrangements. This had been achieved by removing some fourteen days from the time taken to check and remove a confirmed abandoned vehicle. Members were advised that following consultation with a Contractor engaged in a pilot scheme for the removal of abandoned vehicles with a number of London Boroughs, it had been established that there would be significant cost implications for the Council if a contractor were engaged, well in excess of those currently met through administration and disposal charges.

Members were advised of the consultation exercise currently being undertaken jointly by DEFRA and DTLR on abandoned vehicles, which was clearly recognised by the Government as a national problem. Views were being sought on proposals including the removal of dumped cars within 24 hours and new powers to track down and prosecute owners and offenders. The Committee Members agreed that the review had adequately covered the issue of abandoned vehicles and that no further report was required at this stage.

RESOLVED: (1) That Cabinet be recommended to approve that the collection of household waste on a Sunday be expressly excluded in the Cleansing Services Contract.

(2) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the Improvement Plan as set at 10.0 of the report including the option for a six day working week for any future Cleansing Services Contract (excluding Sundays) should this be of benefit to the Council.

29. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF BUILDING CONTROL. The Committee considered the report of the Building Control Best Value Review Team regarding the outcome of the Best Value Review of Building Control.

Members were informed that the Building Control Best Value Review had been a concise review that had been carried out with no impact on the day-to-day service experienced by the customer. The review team had concentrated on improving the level of service experienced by customers, reducing the net cost to the Council of the Building Control Service and raising public awareness of the service and the benefits it provided.

As part of the review, the principal users of the service (Architects and Builders) were consulted to identify priority areas for improvement and current satisfaction levels. Staff were consulted to draw on their experience of current working practices and how they could be improved. Comparisons were drawn with other authorities to assess the cost and competitiveness of the service and to draw on their experience.

The review team recommended retaining the service in house and making significant improvements including the adoption of a risk assessment protocol and a revised Service Level Agreement with the Engineering Section of Amenities to achieve:

- A reduction in the overall cost to the Council of approximately £19,000. from 2004–5.
- A reduction in the cost of the Building Control section with effect from 2002-3. The exact amount was to be set in March as consultation with the Council's Insurers and a revision of time recording by the engineering section would need to be carried out in the interim period.
- An increase in the number of applications dealt with – additional 10% for 2002-3 this would also lead to a reduction in cost for the Council as these applications would attract fees and it was believed that there was a capacity for dealing with more applications within existing, albeit modified structures.
- An increase in those accessing the service/downloading forms/communicating electronically – e capability by 2002, year on year increase from base of 0.
- A year on year increase in the satisfaction of those who regularly use the service – qualitative survey to be undertaken annually.
- An increase in the number of partners for whom Building Control provides services nationally - an additional partner by 2003.
- Independent accreditation (ISO 9002) by 2004.
- A more professionally qualified workforce - two additional members of staff members of Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors by 2005.
- A faster vetting time for applications – 95% within 14 days.
- A more customer focussed and flexible inspection regime – out of hours, early morning, short notice inspections to be trialled 2002.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended to approve the Improvement Plan as set out in appendix 1 of the report.

30. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC.

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as otherwise there was a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972. The relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A are shown beneath the items.

31. SUMMARY OF CONFIDENTIAL PROCEEDINGS FOR INFORMATION.

(NOTE: The full minute of the undermentioned items are set out in the confidential section of these minutes.

a) **BEST VALUE REVIEW BUILDING CONTROL - APPENDIX 4.** The Committee considered the report of the Building Control Best Value Review Team and agreed the recommendations detailed within the report.

(Exempt information reason – Para 1 - Information relating to Employees).

b) **BEST VALUE REVIEW OF LIFELINE - INTERIM REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Lifeline Best Value Review Team and agreed the recommendations detailed within the report.

(Exempt information reason – Para 9 - Terms of a Proposed Contract).

The meeting closed at 8.22 p.m.

A E LEGGETT

Chairman